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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Joint written statement* submitted by the Agence pour les droits de l'homme, the Islamic Human Rights Commission, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[02 June 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Human rights situation in Nigeria*

Condemning the continued repression of the Shia minority in Nigeria and call for urgent action to release Sheikh Zakzaky

Since the violent repression of religious minority by the military in December 2015, human rights activists have repeatedly emphasized the need for the Nigerian government to respect the principles of human rights and freedom for its minority citizens, and in particular of Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky, whom the authorities have kept incommunicado without charges. These calls by various state and non-state actors, local and international groups, as well as several Rights organizations unfortunately have fallen on deaf ears thus far. The minority Shia community continue to face the most severe forms of officially sanctioned repression characterized by arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, denial of access to legal and health services, forced evictions and unlawful demolitions of their properties. Nigerian authorities continue to disregard and disrespect court orders compelling them to release the Sheikh. The religious minorities in general and the Shia minority in particular, is an endangered group in the country.

Several groups including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Islamic Human Rights Commission have all recently issued statements calling on the Nigerian authorities to end the crackdown on the country's Islamic movement and free the leader of this movement.

More than eighteen months since the wave of the repression against the Shias in Nigeria began; Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky and his wife are among several hundred persons still being detained by the authorities. Many hundred others remain either killed and buried in mass graves (by official government confessions), or are missing without trace with their fate still unknown. There is still no clear response from the government of Nigeria on the mass graves or the fate of many hundreds of these forced disappearances.

The role of the Nigerian armed forces, particularly the army, and subsequently the police as well in these violent actions against religious minorities in Zaria, Kaduna, Kano, Jos, Katsina, and Abuja raises serious questions about Nigeria's commitment to its human rights obligations. Unfortunately, these continued violent suppressions of religious minority groups; particularly Shias and the total disobedience of judgements by competent courts seeking to enforce their fundamental rights have remained totally unpunished. This is a firm evidence of Nigerian government's unwillingness to dispense justice and a blatant disregard for rule of law.

Nigerian government has currently banned the activities of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria. Even when members of the minority stage peaceful demonstrations calling for the release of their leader, Sheikh Zakzaky, combined forces of military and police have more than often forcibly dispersed them in clear violation of their rights to peaceful protests. Despite the numerous campaigns for the release of their Leader and the numerous demands to respect their rights by groups and organizations as well as through court pronouncements, instances of human rights violations and repression remain unabated, while government deliberately refuse to heed these calls.

In the light of the above therefore, Human Rights Agency and the coalition of Human Rights groups and other civil society organizations from across Nigeria and Worldwide, are strongly opposed to the continued illegal detention of Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky and all other prisoners of faith, and condemn it strongly.

We urge the United Nations to take very serious measures to stop the continued crackdown on Shias and all other religious minorities in Nigeria, to forestall the possible occurrence of genocide.

Human Rights Agency and the coalition of Human Rights groups and other civil society organizations from across Nigeria and Worldwide, ask the UN to urgently study the issue of religious minorities, including Shia and Christian

minorities in Nigeria, and compel the government to respect minority rights and obey its courts' judgements with regards to their rights.

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*Strategic Empowerment and Mediation Agency, Centrum Initiative For Development And Fundamental Rights Advocacy (CEDRA), Islamic Initiative for Human Rights Protection, (IIHRP), Imam Mahdi Foundation For Global Peace, Shuhada Foundation, Islamic Medical Association Initiative (ISMA), Islamic Human Rights Commission, Socio Economic and Accountability, Al-Wahdal Islamiyya Foundation, Christian-Muslim Alternative To Conflict, National Tranquility Movement (NTM), NGOs without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.